The Early Modern Origins of Chinese Indology

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Thanks to the activities of over a thousand years of Buddhist translation, China inherited a massive amount of South Asian materials, entirely eclipsing pre-modern translations into the languages of Europe. But as we shall see, even in the early seventeenth century the priority seems to have been to restate the message of these materials in Chinese terms rather than examine them as evidence for another cultural tradition. This changed in the early nineteenth century, shortly before the outbreak of the Opium Wars that are usually taken to mark the beginning of Chinese modernity. The reformist Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) initiated the study of Buddhist texts as translations, identifying problems in understanding their structure and meaning explicitly as works originally composed in another language. This move, completely independent of European Indology, seems to me to explain why Sanskrit had arrived on the curriculum of Chinese Buddhist colleges by the early twentieth century and why twentieth and twenty-first century intellectuals like Chen Yinke (1890-1969) and Rao Zongyi (1917-2018) included Indology in their own scholarly formation with a view to reconsidering the Chinese tradition. For once we begin to examine the situation just described in more detail, it is possible to locate continuities between the early nineteenth and late twentieth century that have not been identified before. The following remarks are tentative and exploratory, but they do suggest that recognition of the Indian heritage of China did play a certain role in the recent transformation of China. This evidence is in particular consistent with another recent discovery, namely the importance for a certain time in the early twentieth century of the study of technical aspects of Indian Buddhist philosophy.1 To this particular story, it seems, there was an earlier prologue, though even to understand that it is necessary to first glance back at the whole saga of China’s contacts with India.

For both South Asia and East Asia possess deep-rooted and well-developed traditions of civilization on a par with that of Europe, and for over two millennia these two neighbouring centres have been aware of each other. The extent of that awareness has
not been uniform: P. C. Bagchi remarks for example that “Surprisingly there is very little record of the contact between these two nations in Indian literary sources”. But the couple of instances he cites could be considerably expanded by taking into account references from Indian literary sources surviving in Chinese translation, even though one may alas as yet point to no overall account of these in English. No wonder, since there exists still today a vast quantity of such material to be searched, by one estimate getting on for forty million characters, a figure easily eclipsing the eight million characters preserved in later times from Chinese antiquity, to say nothing of the less than eight hundred thousand words from non-European sources found in the Christian Bible. True, Europe was more deeply affected by its early imports like coinage, the alphabet and monotheism than China ultimately was by Indian religion, but in terms of heritage East Asia was always far better placed to appreciate civilizational diversity.

Yet despite the famous instances of Chinese pilgrims journeying to India to study Sanskrit and bring back the texts that were translated, at first sight there appears to have been little in a tradition of “Indian Studies” in China, as opposed to the study of Buddhism through translated sources, which was something like the traditional study of the Bible only as it existed in Latin. If we look at the existing short histories of Chinese Indology, they would seem to cover only the last hundred years. But it is worth noting that the most recent addition to these, an academic biography of the Estonian Baron who initiated the teaching of Sanskrit in Peking University in 1918, makes it clear that his initiative alone was not responsible for the establishment of his subject. He was soon joined in fact by a fellow student of one of his teachers in Germany, the historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, who had acquired his knowledge of Sanskrit quite independently of the fledgling operation in Beijing. In fact if we push back earlier than the formal foundation of Indological training in China we can see an enthusiasm for the potential of studying Sanskrit clearly expressed before the fall of Manchu China in 1911. Already we find the famous late imperial lay promoter of Buddhist education, Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837-1911), recommending the translation of the Chinese legacy of Buddhist materials back into Sanskrit, though in his case we would need to take account of his contacts with the pioneers of modern Japanese Indology also, a topic that would lead us in a slightly different direction.

But can we really go back yet further, beyond the nineteenth century beginnings of what is normally seen as “Modern Chinese History”, from the Opium Wars onward? At first sight the prospects seem rather bleak. For despite the more than two millennia of Chinese knowledge of India, a recent very well researched monograph by Matthew W. Mosca would argue that if anything China knew less about India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century than it had done under more cosmopolitan dynasties of the past. The Qianlong Emperor, most successful ruler of the Manchu Qing dynasty, for example, seem to have struggled to place the land known as Hindustan in relation to the India of earlier Buddhist travel accounts, and to have concluded therefore that the two must be separate, if adjacent; his subjects were scarcely in a position to disagree. Mosca’s overall argument – that a decentralized frontier policy did not allow an overall strategic picture of the British advance in South Asia to form in China until the time of the Opium War – is well presented and difficult to disagree with, certainly in the terms in which the argument is formulated. But perhaps other perspectives are possible. Granted that his approach has added a huge amount to what has been an unduly neglected topic, still – at least as perceived from the point of view of the history of religion – it may be seen as ultimately deriving from a tradition of North American
scholarship most prominently exemplified by John King Fairbank (1907-1991), wherein conceptions of what historically constituted knowledge tend to relate to policy issues. After all, Fairbank had in his time served in military intelligence. Strategic knowledge aside, awareness of the world beyond China was also surely embodied in a more diffuse cultural discourse—or so I would argue.⁹

And indeed if we look at the early nineteenth century in China we find that awareness of external cultural influences was in some circles at least nothing if not acute, and also rather articulate. The eminent scholar and administrator Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), for example, eloquently elucidates his quest for a thorough philological re-examination of the roots of the Chinese tradition by means of an essay on the pagoda, or ta 塔. It is in his view obvious that this architectural feature of the Chinese built environment formed no part of the original Chinese tradition of antiquity, but rather can be traced to the external influence of Buddhism. The very term was an innovation, making this extraneous origin linguistically clear even though the object might also be described in purely Chinese terminology. Yet—to paraphrase his essay—how can we would-be authentic Confucians of the age be sure about other less obvious accretions to the original purity of Chinese culture? How can we be sure that the very words in the Chinese language for basic concepts like “human nature” xìng 性 have not acquired meanings due to foreign influence from Buddhist sources? Only a massive, systematic philological exercise to determine the true meaning of the texts of the Confucian heritage can free us from the unseen effects of linguistic change.¹⁰

The issues raised by Ruan represent a desire for cultural purism prompted not so much by immediate political events, even if the Manchu conquest of 1644 had cast a long shadow over Chinese thinking about their culture. Rather, his concerns stem most naturally from what Benjamin Elman describes as the movement within the Confucian tradition from philosophy to philology.¹¹ Nor was Ruan in any sense a disloyal servant to his Manchu masters—quite the contrary, in fact.¹² Equally, his philologically acute sense of cultural purism was not shared by all, and indeed the generation of his parents had seen at least one conspicuous example of a well-known Confucian scholar and friend of earlier philologists, Peng Shaosheng 彭绍升 (1740-1796) who saw no contradiction in being a devout Buddhist at the same time.¹³ Conceptions of tradition in pre-modern China were by no means uniform.¹⁴ For such men there was perhaps a degree of similarity with the contemporary European situation, wherein a Victorian gentleman could be both a good classicist and a devout Christian, but in China—unlike Europe—the Chinese religious beliefs inherited from antiquity were in Chinese Buddhist eyes seen not as mere superstition but as true only at a relative, worldly level, while the cultural tradition promoted by Confucius retained a full value as a civilizational force, in their eyes just as much as in the eyes of their non-Buddhist friends.

Where on the spectrum of possible attitudes towards tradition should we situate Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1856), the scholar responsible in the eyes of Matthew Mosca for resolving the confusions concerning the geography of India inherited from earlier times?¹⁵ A comprehensive account of Wei’s position would require extended discussion, for besides his eminence as a pioneer of modern geographical knowledge in China, he also contributed a great deal to new thinking about the nature of the Chinese state and how to address China’s problems that has been seen as setting the course for many future developments, up to our own times.¹⁶ For present purposes, however, it is necessary to recognise that he was, amongst other things, as devout a Buddhist as Peng
Shaosheng. In this regard, moreover, he followed the example of a slightly older friend whose career was equally dedicated to the strengthening of China in the face of new enemies, but who died in his forties, leaving behind a reputation above all as a poet, namely Gong Zizhen 龔自珍.17

At first sight the Buddhism of Gong and Wei seems to follow on smoothly from that of Peng in the preceding century: they are all self-conscious heirs of the great Buddhist masters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, beyond which they look back to other major Chinese figures of earlier epochs, and their intellectual interests are tinged with a palpable admixture of piety rather startling in the context of the minute philological scholarship of the age. But Gong at least, whose maternal grandfather was a very noted philologist, does manifest new elements in his approach to Buddhist materials that bear close examination.18 Rather than attempt any balanced assessment of either Gong or Wei’s involvement with Buddhism, the following remarks therefore concentrate on the distinctive features of the Buddhist writings of both men. It is much to the credit of the editors of Gong’s “Collected Works”, published in 1975, that at a time when it was his critical attitude towards tradition that validated discussion of his writings they should have included as the sixth out of eleven sections a compendium of his Buddhist pieces. But the most startling feature of this section is that it begins with seven essays or technical notes devoted to problems of translation. Of course all Chinese Buddhists were in a sense aware that their scriptures were translated, especially when the *Journey to the West* undertaken to bring them to China with the assistance of the legendary Monkey King was one of the best-loved stories in East Asia. But in a sense in late imperial times at least this was simply taken as a given: in the eyes of at least one of the great seventeenth century Buddhist leaders that Gong admired, the problem now was to translate the literal meaning of those scriptures into a language that made sense within Chinese culture, something that demanded a willingness to employ the terminology of the native intellectual tradition, even if it derived from texts themselves considered Daoist.19

So raising the topic of translation at the primary, linguistic level might seem from this standpoint distinctly retrograde. What was Gong up to? The first essay in the set addresses what he took to be evident problems in the translation of the *Lotus Sutra*. This scripture has been immensely influential in East Asia, and today it still inspires in particular some remarkably vigorous religious movements based in Japan. Though Sanskrit versions survive from Nepal and elsewhere, the repeated translations of the text into Chinese from the third century CE onwards have allowed modern scholars important insights into its evolution over the course of time.20 In sum, a basic work seems to have been extended by additions, not all of which may be found in some translated versions. Traditional Buddhist scholarship in East Asia has long recognized the consequent double structure within the work, but has always treated it even so as constituting an integral source representing as with all other sutras the very word of the Buddha.21 Gong does not appear to doubt the status of the *Lotus* as Buddha’s word, but after comparing the best-known translation with two others certainly views the double structure and other possible dislocations in the order of the text as no more than the result of a faulty redaction, in which two originally separate texts have been run into one in the process of translation.22 In the light of modern scholarship he is certainly wrong, but his criticism of the received text of a religious classic by means of a “two source” theory shows an independence of approach reminiscent of the higher...
criticism of the Bible that developed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, even if he sees his text not solely as a human creation.

10 Gong next moves on to three essays on the main Chinese “Pure Land” text, again comparing different translations to raise questions, especially concerning the number of vows originally said to have been made by the Buddha now dwelling in the Pure Land at the time of aspiring to achieve a Buddhahood entailing its creation: the enumeration of these does indeed vary from translation to translation. Once again Gong suggests that this variation stems from shortcomings in translation, with the number of vows increased by some translators –a reasonable assumption even if again one somewhat less nuanced than current scholarship prefers. But in the third of this group of essays he pushes further and suggests that the inflation of numbers in Buddhist texts as due to Indian commentators, on the grounds that the Buddha himself would not have indulged in childish exaggeration. This again suggests a mind still devout, yet not uncritical. Gong’s fifth essay attacks the “Perfection of Wisdom” literature available in Chinese, and specifically the massive compilation of this literature translated in the seventh century CE, from the largest version in a notional one hundred thousand lines down to the Heart sutra, which amounts to less than two pages in English. For him the largest version, even though we should recall that it took pride of place in traditional printings of the Buddhist canon, can only be inauthentic, since it is not mentioned in the copious translated commentary on the corpus dating to a quarter of a millennium before its eventual appearance in Chinese.

11 Gong’s next essay actually covers two topics, though both relate to the representation of the phonology of Indian languages in Chinese. The first concerns the inadequate method originally used by Buddhist translators to convey in Chinese syllables the unfamiliar syllabic shape of foreign words. This actually provides some useful information on the sources for his observations, to which we shall return below. The second argument concerns the mixture of prose and verse in Buddhist translations. Since Chinese was incapable of reproducing what he took to be the rhyme schemes employed in the latter, and usually resorted to a form of “blank verse” that was neither Chinese nor Indian, there was no point in trying to reproduce the frequent restatements within Buddhist texts in alternating formats, and one might as well stick to the prose and cut out the representation of what was originally verse on the grounds that in terms of the content it was entirely redundant. Chinese translators were perfectly well aware that the repetitious nature of Buddhist texts needed to be curbed in translation, but Gong’s approach was more drastic than any earlier stated guidelines. And while his statements about the novelty of the Chinese forms used to represent Buddhist verse and their subsequent influence beyond the translation context are basically correct, he does not seem to have been aware that South Asian poetry was metrical, and that it was the invariant length of Chinese syllables rather than the difficulty of finding rhymes that subverted any attempt to render Buddhist verse into Chinese.

12 A final, seventh essay concludes his observations, but takes us well beyond a narrow concern with the immediate process of translation. To Gong the Buddha’s teaching was plainly oral, but he followed the normal East Asian assumption that it had been reduced to writing immediately after his passing. Even so he does not envisage this move as having stabilized the texts in the canon; rather, he sees competing groups in Indian society as having exploited the prestige of possessing Buddhist scriptures in their own
interests, altering them to suit their own purposes, and adding to them further if they still “did not sell” 猶不售, 則又加. Translators through failing to discriminate between these accretions and the original message of the Buddha had perpetrated a deception on China. Gong returns to this point in a rather longer piece following his seven essays on translation, in which he raises forty-two problems in relation to the Lotus Sutra. The majority of these concern his views on the need to reorder the text and purge it of material that was in his view interpolated. But in his thirty-sixth query he addresses the underlying cause for the unsatisfactory transmission of the scripture, and once again points to the effects of vigorous competition within what we might term (especially in view of his mercantile language, just cited) the religious market place in expanding the cumulative amount of increasingly lower quantity material surrounding the original core. In fact he draws a remarkable analogy to make this point. “Suppose persons from the West arrived to discuss the Spring and Autumn Annals and the Analects of Confucius, and the scholars of our land gave these texts to them, on top of which they then mistakenly gave them the commentaries and sub-commentaries, and on top of that mistakenly loaded the examination essays of recent times concerning these texts, plus mistakenly on top of that the further explicated and commented commercial printings of those essays, and the Westerners, without distinguishing between them, translated them all to take home –are not the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra that have come east just like this?”

Now it is certainly true that Wei Yuan’s writings on Buddhism do not display the same interest as is manifest in Gong’s essays concerning the perils of translation. But a reading of the prefaces to his Buddhist works contained in his literary writings, and also of the annotation to his compilations themselves, reveals that he did share exactly the same assumptions. In 1853 Wei published a collection of Pure Land texts in order to bring together four of the main works in this tradition into one handy collection. One of the main texts is precisely the one that, as noted above, Gong had consulted in different translations in order to establish how many vows had authentically been included in the basic text. Wei, following earlier precedents, combines the different translations into one synthetic edition of the text, but makes it quite clear that he too sees the number of vows as having been augmented beyond those originally present, and accordingly reduces them to what he considered to have been the initial quantity. But in his preface to the resulting edition he also adduces further external evidence for this reduction, citing a translated Indian treatise on the text that appears only to deal with the lower figure he adopts. This is yet another case in which contemporary scholarship finds the issue somewhat more complex than Wei allows. Yet Wei’s readiness to adduce what he had available in the way of Indian scholastic literature here resembles Gong’s use of similar materials in discussing the Perfection of Wisdom corpus: both men try to verify their suppositions from supporting evidence. At the same time an examination of Wei’s synthetic edition itself shows that despite his willingness to adduce a range of sources in establishing his edition, some of his editorial judgments simply reflect his own sense of what the Buddha would have said, in rather the same way that Gong concludes that what appears to him to be puerile cannot be authentic.

There is no doubt that much more could be said about the Buddhist studies of Gong and Wei, and indeed on the internet in Chinese one may find plenty of further discussions on the topic. But for present purposes the foregoing remarks have tried to summarize the most important aspects of their critical reflections on the Indian Buddhist heritage.
in China. Obviously their achievements should not be overstated. What does seem to be new in their work, however, may be divided into two elements. First, and most importantly for what was to follow, they problematized materials originally in foreign languages in a way that was totally unprecedented. The basic criterion for authenticity in Chinese Buddhism up to this point was simply whether a work was a genuine translation or not —there were plenty of texts that on this criterion were deemed to be inauthentic, confections put together in China that were designed to look like translations. But beyond the clear labelling of Indian materials as also inauthentic (wei 僞, the precise negative term of bibliographical evaluation that Gong applied to the 100,000 line Perfection of Wisdom text), we find Gong at least articulating a general theory of the cumulative dilution of authentic tradition by increasingly inferior material. This was in China something that seems to have been unprecedented in Buddhist circles and indeed in Chinese scholarly circles in general, with one possible exception. For accusations of inauthenticity were also applied to works or parts of works in the classical Chinese tradition, and the assumption that over time knowledge of antiquity had diminished is fundamental to the Confucian vision of history, but analysis of any general mechanism responsible for the production of spurious literature is still much harder to find. The one predecessor to Gong working on Chinese antiquity rather than Buddhist sources who did evolve some general ideas of this sort, Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816), has since the early twentieth century been credited with perceiving the existence of accumulating strata of accretionary material, but his influence in the mid-nineteenth century seems by all accounts to have been completely non-existent.

Much closer to Gong in terms of the materials he worked on and in the expression of his ideas was a Japanese predecessor of the eighteenth century, Tominaga Nakamoto 永仲基 (1715-1746), an independent and remarkably insightful critic of Buddhist literature so striking that his main work, written in Classical Chinese, has been rendered into English in its entirety. Tominaga anticipates Gong for example in pointing to the originally oral nature of the Buddha’s teaching, and in stressing competition construed in mercantile terms as a factor in promoting inauthentic Buddhist material. Now we know that Japanese books were certainly imported into China in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gong was, moreover, well aware of the importance of both Chinese works in Japanese editions and of Japanese publications in Sinology, and tried to secure Japanese imports for his own studies. But I suspect that his own excursions into Buddhism were conducted without any knowledge of Tominaga’s, and simply reflect a broad commonality of approach. The Japanese scholar for example takes a broad view of the development of Buddhist literature, and does not focus on specific texts in the same way that Gong starts with a focus on the Lotus Sutra and the Pure Land literature and only then broadens his discussion to more general principles. This pattern may indeed reflect the chronology of Gong’s studies: there is no sense anywhere that he is working from a pre-existing overview provided by someone else. Both men shared an important precondition to their researches, namely access to the well over a thousand translated texts available in printed copies of the Buddhist Canon. Such massive sets were not generally held by private individuals, but could be found fairly readily in monastic libraries, and in Gong’s case a short piece promoting funds for a new monastic library in Beijing shows that there he was familiar with and no doubt had regular opportunities to read at least two printed editions. But Gong, with his declared focus on problems of translation,
also has more of an interest in language than Tominaga, for reasons that are worth examining.

Most studies of the history of China during the period of Manchu domination make the apparently quite plausible assumption that the fact that the rulers of the Qing Empire spoke another language was of no consequence for the Chinese—after all, access to Manchu materials or even Mongol ones generally did not bring them into contact with many sources not already available in Chinese, and in the case of Manchu plenty of what was available derived from Chinese in the first place. Chinese scholars of the time found much comfort in the “Yuan analogy”, comparing their situation to that of the period of Mongol domination, which had not affected the learned pursuits of the Chinese elite even though they were removed from political power—they had been, as it were, left to their own devices. But the Manchus did not have a world empire to run, and lacking the numbers for an enterprise on a like scale were much more involved in the Chinese base of their rule. Many of the Chinese elite were for career purposes obliged to learn Manchu, and even those who did not cannot have failed to notice the polyglot ambitions of their rulers.

Gong Zizhen, at any rate, had a learned Manchu friend, Yu’en 裕恩 whom he describes in a short poem concerning his mastery of many scripts—only Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī are mentioned in the poem itself, but in a note Gong declares that his friend can read “Enetkek, Tibetan, Western (Xiāng 西洋), Mongol, Hui, and Manchu and Chinese”. “Enetkek” was the Manchu word for “Indian”, something of a geographical puzzle for them as Matthew Mosca shows, though in this context it probably refers to Devanagari, while “Western” must indicate the Roman alphabet, and “Hui” perhaps Arabic. Gong also notes that Yu’en was devoted to the comparative study of translations—not, apparently, between different languages but between different versions in Chinese, a form of scholarship he describes as “unprecedented”. The poem is one of a very famous series produced by Gong in 1839, almost at the end of his life, so it would be interesting to know exactly how far back this friendship extended.

It may well be that Gong was moved to undertake his studies independently in any case. Mosca gives a succinct account of the polyglot scholarship of the Qianlong Emperor, including his massive pentaglot compilation of dhāraṇī, with the underlying Sanskrit rendered into the languages of the four complete printed canons he sponsored in Mongol (created by his grandfather in 1718-1720; Tanjur 1741/42-1749), Tibetan (revised in 1737), Chinese (1733 to 1738) and eventually a new Manchu translation also, in 1773-1790. In the pentaglot, moreover, the pronunciation was indicated for readers of Chinese in a new and decidedly complex transcription. He ponders with good reason the improbability of anyone outside court circles even thinking of emulating such specialised scholarship. Yu’en’s case perhaps suggests that some Manchus could, but even more the style of the Emperor’s research would have been known in outline at least to many of the Chinese scholars who worked in the Beijing area. Gong’s note on problems of transcription, his sixth essay on translation problems, states that he had seen the woodblocks for printing the pentaglot in the Yonghe gong, the “Lama Temple” of Beijing. Even if emulation was out of the question, the existence of such scholarship was not necessarily without influence.

Gong and indeed Wei would in any case have been aware of linguistic diversity within the territory of the Qing Empire, since both were interested in problems of imperial control in the New Frontier territory of Xinjiang, where Chinese was not the language
of the local inhabitants; it was indeed another area where the polyglot, multi-ethnic approach of the Manchus prevailed.\textsuperscript{49} The southern regions of China were of course in some ways more spectacularly polyglot, and had been more consistently in contact with Han Chinese culture, but the relative absence of writings systems there made the inhabitants culturally much less visible. How to read the expansion of the Manchus westward is a current historiographic problem, in that to characterize it as imperial is sometimes seen by historians in the current Chinese nation state as a means of casting aspersions on the legitimacy of its control there. Non-Chinese historians –and not just American China specialists– have for some time now found the notion of Manchu imperialism useful.\textsuperscript{50} Might it be that this imperialism fostered a form of what we know as Orientalism, a desire to analyse and place the traditions of others?

20 Such a reading of Gong and Wei will not work, for they are clearly devout Buddhists, but it could still be that the expansion of knowledge prompted by an expansion of control engendered a readiness to consider broader cultural horizons. Buddhism itself was nothing new in China, but a new awareness of non-Chinese Buddhists could have given it a degree of unfamiliarity. Was it this that prompted a new, at least slightly more detached examination of its texts? Or was this part of something else, part of the trend “from philosophy to philology”, for example? That, too, might have been stimulated to some degree by contacts with the Manchu language, though the roots of the movement may arguably be found as far back as the late sixteenth century, before even the possible stimulus of a certain amount of new knowledge from Europe, either.\textsuperscript{51} Certainly Gong was part of the trend: one of his lost works seems to have been devoted to eliminating Han period interpolations from the text of a Confucian Classic.\textsuperscript{52}

21 But even if he does not seem to have used what is said to have been an actual knowledge of Manchu or Mongol in his Buddhist studies –and in truth the former would have been of restricted value to a reader of Chinese, and the latter only useful as a reflection of the Tibetan rendering of Sanskrit– still there is something about his approach which is novel and in a relative way critical, and the same may be said of Wei.\textsuperscript{53} It was novel to try to conceptualise the workings of a cumulative tradition in another civilisation, especially when from a Confucian perspective there was no civilization apart from China. There may be other signs of this step towards a more cosmopolitan stance in the early nineteenth century, if we look for them. When for instance another great scholar and bibliophile, Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843), completed his massive compilation of literary pieces predating 618 CE, Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, in 1836, he added at the very end a number of what he considered to be literary pieces –letters, inscriptions, and the like– by Indian authors that he found translated in the Buddhist Canon, though his model, a compilation devoted to the next three centuries that had appeared in 1814, does not pursue this editorial policy at all.

22 How should we characterise these innovations? “Early modern”, as deployed in the title of this piece merely as a rough indicator of the period discussed here, represents a concession to conceptions of tradition and modernity which may imply far too clean a dichotomy, imposing irrelevant criteria from the outside. Certainly there are interesting clues suggesting that the position of Buddhism in East Asia may have been important in the nineteenth century in thinking about civilisation and about change. Japanese who came to Britain even before the Meiji Restoration of 1868, for example, seem to have taken up the study of Sanskrit as well as Chinese, in preference to solely
“Western” topics. In the twentieth century, as Paul Katz has shown, Buddhism proved of great significance to many eminent Chinese, not excluding the supposed Methodist Chiang Kai-shek. Yet at the same time during the Cultural Revolution it was categorized by the Red Guards as a foreign religion, despite its some two millennia of history in China. Would Ruan Yuan have been pleased by this?

The position of Buddhism in China is unique. If one must use Western analogies to explain it, then it has all the familiarity of Christianity and all of the alterity of Islam. Indology flourishes today in Beijing, as it has long done in Hong Kong in the person of the immensely talented traditional artist and polymath, the late Rao Zongyi. Gong Zizhen and Wei Yuan might find the secular scholarship of the present day unfamiliar, but surely they would understand the impulse to explore the Indian heritage, for to them it was undeniably involved in the Chinese heritage too.

NOTES

1. For this development, see John Makeham, ed., Transforming Consciousness: Yogacara Thought in Modern China, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
3. For the reader of Japanese, the most important of these may be found listed in Akanuma Chizen 赤瀬智善, Indo Bukkyō koyu meishi jiten (Nagoya: Hashinkaku, 1931), pp. 130-131.
4. The estimate for South Asian materials in Chinese, by Paul Demiéville, in Choix d’études Bouddhiques (Leiden: Brill, 1973), p. 158, may be a little on the high side in view of what we now know concerning the Chinese propensity for producing their own sutras –some of them very popular sutras– in the style of translations, but even if we deduct a few million for such products, the total must remain vast. For the estimate of the Chinese “classical” corpus, see p. 50 of Russell McLeod, “Sinological Indexes in the Computer Age: The ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series”, China Review International 1.1 (1994), pp.48-53. From the overall total for the Christian Bible we should deduct most of the New Testament, which was plainly written in Greek, though some parts may have been transferred from Aramaic.
5. About half a dozen surveys up to 2008 are listed in Y. Sueki, Bibliographical Sources for Buddhist Studies from the Viewpoint of Buddhist Philology (Tokyo: The Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2008), pp. 401-402.
importance of Sanskrit in the years before the 1911 Revolution—a topic on which much more could be said.


9. For some fuller background remarks arguing this point, see T. H. Barrett, "Ignorance and the technology of information: Some comments on China’s knowledge of the West on the eve of the 'Western Invasion’", Asian Affairs, 36.1 (n.s.) (1995), pp. 20-31.

10. Ruan Yuan, "Ta xing shuo" 塔性說, Yanjing shi xu ji 楫經室續集 3.2a-4a (Sibu congkan edition).


12. This is clearly established by Betty Peh-Ti Wei, Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849: The Life and Work of a Major Scholar-Official in Nineteenth-Century China before the Opium War, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006.


14. For some preliminary remarks on this, see T. H. Barrett, Li Ao: Buddhist, Taoist, or Neo-Confucian? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 139-140.

15. Mosca, Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy, pp. 271-304.


17. Gong’s literary importance is discussed in Shirleen S. Wong, Kung Tzu-chen (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), a volume that also provides a succinct biography in English.

18. For Gong’s advice from his grandfather, see Wong, Kung Tzu-chen, p. 36.

19. I have described the case made in this regard in “Deqing and Daoism: A View of Dialogue and Translation from Late Ming China”, Culture and Dialogue 3.1 (March, 2013), pp. 11-23.

20. A readable introduction to current understanding of the transmission and significance of the Lotus Sutra may be found in the essays contained in Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, eds, Readings of the Lotus Sutra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); the editors provide a succinct account of the evolution of the text on pp. 4-8. The best-known Chinese version of the text is translated into English with notes on divergences from the Sanskrit tradition in Leon Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra), Translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), also reissued with minor modifications in 2009; for this and other translations, see Teiser and Stone, Readings in the Lotus Sutra, pp. 237-240.


22. Gong Zizhen, Gong Zizhen quanji 龔自珍全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), VI, p. 357—though there are more recent editions of his writings, I am assuming that this has still the widest circulation.

23. Again we are dealing with a work existing in Chinese and Sanskrit that has attracted a wealth of traditional and modern scholarship. There is a study that presents the text in question and its main companion in translations into English derived from originals in both Asian languages, together with commentary designed to elucidate the problems raised here by Gong and others: see Luis O Gómez, The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), pp. 128-130 in particular.
25. A brief synopsis of the development of this group of texts as provisionally understood in contemporary scholarship may be found in Paul Williams, Māhāyana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 48.
29. Gong, Gong Zizhen quanji VI, p. 369.
30. Date according to the preface to the collection as printed in Wei Yuan, Wei Yuan ji 魏源集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), p. 248.
31. Wei, Wei Yuan ji, p. 248.
32. See the discussion of various opinions, ancient and modern, on the matter in Hisao Inagaki, T’an-luan’s Commentary on Vasubandhu’s Discourse on the Pure Land: A Study and Translation (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1998), pp. 54-56.
33. Wei’s collection, Jingtu sijing 净土四經, was discovered and printed after the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion by Yang Wenhui in 1866: this according to the reprinting of Yang’s preface in Jingkong 净空, ed., Jingtu wujing duben 净土五經讀本 (Taipei: Caiduan faren Fotuo jiaoyu jijinhui, 1989), p. 418. This work also reprints Wei’s synthetic edition, the annotation to which repeats his evidence for the original number of vows on p. 372, and also exhibits some less supported judgments regarding what could be excised as not authentically Buddhist on pp. 374, 377, 378 and 379.
34. The criterion was of course not unambiguous, as has been illustrated most usefully by the late Antonino Forte, “The Relativity of the Concept of Orthodoxy in Chinese Buddhism: Chih-sheng’s Indictment of Shih-li and the Proscription of the Dharma Mirror Sūtra”, in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 239-249.
36. For a selection from Cui Shu in English, see William Theodore De Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, Richard John Lufrano and Joseph Adler, Sources of the Chinese Tradition, Volume Two (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 60-63. Like Gong, Cui believed that once accretions were removed, a core of truth was there to be revealed. For a balanced account of his scholarship see Michael Quirin, “Scholarship, Value, Method, and Hermeneutics in Kaosheng: Some Reflections on Cui Shu (1740-1816) and the Confucian Classics”, History and Theory 35 (1996), pp. 34-53, and p. 49 in particular for his analysis of the increase in spurious knowledge.
37. For an English translation of Tominaga, see Michael Pye, Emerging from Meditation (London: Duckworth, 1990), and for an insightful evaluation of some of his ideas Hubert Durt, Problems of Chronology and Eschatology (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 1994).
38. Pye, Emerging from Meditation, pp. 84-88.
41. Gong, Gong Zizhen quanji, VI, p. 390. Cf. the listing also on pp. 621 and 662 of this edition of a lost work by Gong reporting his investigations of the imperial Chinese Buddhist Canon of 1733-1738.

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45. For Enetkek, see Mosca, From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy, pp. 60-63, 88-91.

46. Gong’s earliest biographer, Wu Changshou 吳昌綬, whose chronology of his subject was first published in 1900, places a notice of this friendship in 1824, but possibly only because Gong’s Buddhist interests are first introduced at this point, the year in which he edited and reprinted a Buddhist work for the first time, while his work on the Lotus Sutra is assigned to 1837: cf. Gong Zizhen quanji, pp. 607, 621. In a poem dated by commentators to 1827 translated by Wong, Kung Tzu-chen, p. 62, Gong states that he has already read substantially in the Buddhist Canon.

47. Mosca, From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy, pp. 71-73; 97-98.


49. See James A. Milward, Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864 (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 198-202, and pp. 241-245 for the more “sinifying” approach advocated by Gong and Wei.


51. This argument for a pre-Manchu origin for the later development of philology was already made in Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰, Mingdai kaojuxue yanjiu 明代考據學研究, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1983.

52. Gong, Gong Zizhen quanji, pp. 641, 659 –the record is in a supplement (waiji 外紀) to Wu Changshou’s biography, see note 46.

53. Gong’s knowledge of Manchu and Mongol is asserted on the basis of earlier biographical research by Shirleen Wong, Kung Tzu-chen, p. 32.


INDEX

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